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ABSTRACT

This ERIC Digest discusses issues relating to teaching about U.S. foreign policy in the changing international environment following the end of the Cold War era and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The document treats: (1) the need and rationale for teaching and learning about current foreign policy issues; (2) main themes in foreign policy education in the post-Cold War era; (3) balance, inquiry, and decision making in the classroom; and (4) current classroom materials. The U.S. public needs to come to terms with the changing international environment in order to provide a framework or standard to guide policymakers. It is part of the job of education at this juncture in history to help students understand these new issues and be able to take part in the current national dialogue on the future of U.S. foreign policy. In order to participate effectively as citizens in shaping U.S. foreign policy, students must develop an understanding of the range of forces and issues shaping international relations in today's rapidly changing world. The digest describes the following major themes in foreign policy: (1) understanding the international system; (2) responses to international conflict; (3) non-state and transnational actors; (4) understanding U.S. foreign policy in historical perspective; (5) linking foreign and domestic politics; (6) successes in the international system; (7) military technology and proliferation; and (8) north-south relations in the post-Cold War era. Sources for obtaining current classroom material are listed as well as references and ERIC resources. (DK)

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by
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by Susan Graseck

Today the United States finds itself in a world that has changed fundamentally. For more than 40 years the United States and the Soviet Union were the foremost powers and rivals in international affairs. U.S. foreign policy, U.S. domestic politics, and international relations revolved largely around this intense rivalry. Now the Soviet Union no longer exists, and the fifteen new states of the former Soviet Union are caught up in the turmoil of economic and political change. Since the end of the Cold War, there have been fewer external constraints on the projection of U.S. power abroad than at any time since the years immediately following World War II. And yet, there are no longer common understandings among Americans about what the U.S. role should be in this changing international environment. This ERIC Digest treats the (1) need and rationale for teaching and learning about current foreign policy issues; (2) main themes in foreign policy education in the post-Cold War era; (3) balance, inquiry, and decisionmaking in the classroom; and (4) current classroom materials.

The Need and Rationale. In all of the decades of the Cold War, few Americans stopped to consider what would happen if the Cold War ended. When it did, the consensus that guided U.S. foreign policy for over four decades had dissolved. In the new conditions of the post-Cold War world, what constitutes security? Does our understanding of security need to be broadened to encompass economic and environmental concerns? Is a world that operates on democratic principles and respect for human rights a safer world? Are there dangers inherent in exporting democracy? Can security be realized today without a global partnership? If we are to enter into a partnership, what must we sacrifice? Are Americans prepared to share sovereignty with others on issues that affect our future? What role should the United States play in this changing world? What role can we afford to play? And can we afford not to play? These kinds of questions must be examined in our classrooms if American students are to be prepared for citizenship in the twenty-first century.

The American public needs to come to terms with the changing international environment in order to provide a framework or standard to guide policymakers. It is a part of the job of educators at this juncture in history to help students understand these new issues and be able to take part in the current national dialogue on the future of U.S. foreign policy in our rapidly changing world. Students need to understand the past and develop a sense of ownership for the future. They also need the skills to participate in the development of public policy in the future.

Themes in Foreign Policy. In order to effectively participate as citizens in shaping U.S. foreign policy into the next century, students must develop an understanding of the range of forces and issues shaping international relations in today's rapidly changing world. These include the following major themes.

- **Understanding the International System.** Students should understand the concepts of nation, state, sovereignty, alliances and balances of power, diplomacy, international law, the use of force, and deterrence.

- **Responses to International Conflict.** The end of the East-West confrontation has opened new possibilities for peace. It has also lifted the restraints on many of the world's old ethnic, religious, and nationalist struggles. In this environment, conflict is inevitable. How far should the United States go in spending resources abroad or risking American lives—and to what end: International stability? The protection of human rights? Economic self-interest? Safeguarding the environment? What are the alternatives to direct intervention? Should the United States take the lead or act in concert with other countries? How do the principles of self-determination, human rights, and national sovereignty conflict and interact with one another?

- **Non-State and Transnational Actors.** Non-state and transnational actors such as international business, non-governmental organizations (NGO), and commodities cartels are playing an increasing role in international relations. Furthermore, not all threats to security are initiated within the nation-state system.

Increasingly transnational threats are emerging: drug trafficking, terrorism, environmental destruction.

- **Understanding U.S. Foreign Policy in Historical Perspective.** Traditionally international relations has involved alliances and balance of power politics. Initially, the United States tried to remain disengaged from Old World struggles. Following World War II, however, the United States came to embrace balance of power politics and played a central role in the formation of NATO. Students need to understand why the United States has responded in these conflicting ways in the past. The end of the Cold War is initiating a paradigm change. What are the forces at work in this change? Students should understand the tensions among a realpolitik approach to foreign policy, tendencies toward greater global cooperation, the desire to export democracy, and the pull toward a new isolationism.

- **Linking Foreign and Domestic Politics.** The end of the Cold War has given Americans an opportunity to reevaluate our commitment to the international community. There is a tendency within the American public to weigh the cost of foreign involvement against pressing national priorities. In the post-Cold War era, the balance in our foreign policy is moving from primarily military considerations to issues involving economic relations and immigration policy. These issues link foreign policy and domestic politics as two sides of the same coin.

- **Successes in the International System.** While we tend to focus on the failures of the international system, some international systems are working comparatively well (e.g., globalization of information flow, cooperation in outer space, the Law of the Sea, and the Antarctic Treaty). Why does international cooperation work? Can we build on this experience?

- **Military Technology and Proliferation.** During four decades of the Cold War, the specter of nuclear holocaust loomed over the considerations of U.S. policymakers. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the control of nuclear weapons has faded from the public agenda in the United States. Experts in the field, however, warn that the end of the Cold War has not eliminated the dangers we face from nuclear weapons. In many respects, the disintegration of the Soviet Union has added new concerns. Where the Soviet Union once existed, there are now four states with nuclear arsenals on their territories. Security specialists fear that scientists who once worked in the Soviet defense establishment may offer their services to foreign governments. The issue of weapons proliferation also extends beyond nuclear arms. Chemical weapons hold the power of mass destruction, and conventional weapons continue to become more deadly and more expensive. Finally, the development of biological weapons and space-based weapons could add other chilling dimensions to warfare in the future.

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• **North-South Relations in the Post-Cold War Era.** During the Cold War, the so-called "Third World" was often the ideological and military battleground between East and West. Although the Cold War is now over, the developing world still faces significant dilemmas. Lack of monetary and military security, the possibility of nuclear proliferation, ethnic and religious conflicts, as well as myriad food and health problems, make nations of the developing world potential hot spots for international crises. Has development of the industrialized nations occurred at the expense of the underdeveloped nations of the world? Do the newly industrialized countries exemplify possible pathways for generating equitable and mutually beneficial relations between the North and the South?

Balance, Inquiry, and Decisionmaking in the Classroom. In the changing environment of the post-Cold War era, current foreign policy issues are usually contested public policy issues. In this environment, the classroom teacher is ill-advised to teach foreign policy as a settled issue. Rather this period of reevaluation offers an opportunity for teachers to help their students to appreciate ambiguity, to analyze divergent perspectives, to weigh the merits of alternative policies, and to develop an ability to articulate and justify their own considered opinions on the issues at hand.

If students feel that there are rigid and unchanging "right answers" to the issues under discussion, the benefits of open discussion will be forfeited. While there may be a place for materials (or speakers) that advocate one point of view, these should be presented in the context of equally well articulated alternative perspectives.

Teachers should use methods and materials that prompt students to reflect, inquire, and decide about foreign policy issues. Provocative questions should be raised about current issues, which require students to pose alternative responses. The likely consequences of the alternatives, positive and negative—better or worse in terms of clearly stated criteria—should be examined and evaluated. Students, then, should be challenged to make and defend decisions about their choices of alternative responses to current issues. This kind of pedagogy involves intellectually active learning and high-level cognition, which are keys to the acquisition and retention of knowledge and development of practical and transferable cognitive processes and skills.

Keeping Classroom Material Current. In the post-Cold War era, the constant in international relations is change. Under these circumstances, classroom materials that are current today may be out-of-date (or even irrelevant) tomorrow. There are a number of organizations involved in the ongoing development of high-quality curricular materials and educational resources, which can keep classroom materials current.

- ACCESS publishes a balanced series of *Security Spectrum* (4-6 pages) and *Resource Briefs* (2 pages) on a range of current international issues. Although not curricular materials, these materials can be valuable resources for classroom teachers. For more information contact ACCESS, 1511 K St., NW, Suite 643, Washington, DC 20005, (800) 888-6033.

- American Forum on Global Education publishes *The New Global Resource Book*. This is a good source of information on current curricular resources. For more information contact American Forum, 45 John St., Suite 908, NY, NY 10038, (212) 732-8606.

- CHOICES for the 21st Century Education Project publishes an ongoing series of reproducible curricular materials on a range of current foreign policy issues. Units include a "choices" framework of divergent policy alternatives, historical background readings, original documents, student activities handouts, and suggested lesson plans. At least three new topics are published annually, and all units are updated regularly. For more information contact CHOICES, Center for Foreign Policy Development, Box 1948, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912, (401) 863-3155.

- Close Up Foundation publishes *Current Issues*. This presents a synopsis of ten domestic and ten foreign policy issues. It is updated annually. A teachers guide is available. For more information contact Close Up Publishing, Dept. K94, 44 Canal Center Plaza, Alexandria, VA 22314-1592, (800) 765-3131.

- Foreign Policy Association publishes two ongoing series on foreign policy issues. *Headline* is a series of small booklets on individual topics on geographic areas or global issues. *Great Decisions* includes eight topics in a single booklet and is published once a year. *Great Decisions* materials are designed for public discussion and include background readings and policy options. A *Great Decisions Activity Book* is available for classroom teachers. For more information contact Foreign Policy

Association, 729 7th Ave., 8th Floor, New York, NY 10019, (212) 764-4050.

- Scholastic publishes a biweekly current events/issues subscription publication, *Scholastic Update*, for students in grades 8-12. Each of the fourteen issues is devoted to a single topic, divided equally between domestic and international issues. For more information contact Scholastic, 2931 McCarty St., POB 3710, Jefferson City, MO 65102-3710.

- Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE) offers interdisciplinary, cross-cultural curriculum units for elementary and secondary students. SPICE materials present multiple perspectives and seek to enhance critical thinking skills in a range of disciplines. For more information contact SPICE, Littlefield Center, Rm. 14, 300 Lasuen Street, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-5013, (415) 723-1114.

References and ERIC Resources

The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2842; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1440 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from the UMI reprint service.

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